The Year of the Raptor

By Jonathan Olvera

It was a strange spring in France in the late age of 7700—strange because it was both cold and hot, as if two seasons fought silently in the air. The winds carried the bite of winter, but the sun shone with a heat that made the stones steam in the mornings. Above, the sky was not the soft blue of our age, but a deep, black, starless sea—an empty vault in which the sun burned like a torch in a cave.

This was an age before the shift of the sun, before the heavens took the form we know now. In that time, the shores of Brittany were the heart of a bustling civilization. Carnac, the jewel of the French coast, was a place of stones and trade, its market alive with the chatter of fishermen, the laughter of children, and the ringing of hammers shaping goods for barter. People came not only to buy and sell, but to learn new skills, forge bonds, and secure alliances that would shape the destinies of tribes.

The leader of France in those days was a man both wise and humble, though he bore the weight of rule with a stern and unbending manner. His name was King Benjamin, and his eyes, sharp as the hawk's, missed nothing. He had a mind for detail and a hand for justice, and in those weeks he was consumed with preparing Carnac's market for the season's great trade fair. Merchants would arrive from the York territory to the north, their speech thick with foreign turns of phrase. Goods from across the European lands—woven cloth, forged blades, carved talismans—would flood the stalls.

Yet the true wonder of that market was not in the crafts of man, but in the rare beasts brought from distant corners of the earth. In that age, the last of the great land predators still walked the world—creatures whose names are whispered now only in legend. Among them was the Velociraptor, a hunter of swift cunning, a beast that once roamed in numbers but was now dwindling toward extinction. Its food, men said, was man himself.

Jonathan, a young man of twenty summers, traveled with the King as a servant, assisting in matters of trade, diplomacy, and the small daily labors that kept a royal journey moving. He had heard tales of the raptor but never seen one alive. He imagined it as a demon from the forest—scaled, sharp of tooth, and wicked of heart.

The King, however, was fascinated by the creature. In the market square, they found one at last: bound in ropes, its long talons curled like knives, its eyes bright with a hateful intelligence. The merchant who had captured it claimed to have done so in a land far across the sea, where the winds screamed over black cliffs and the earth trembled beneath the creature's hunt.

King Benjamin studied the raptor for a long while, walking in a slow circle around it. He asked questions of its strength, its diet, its cunning. The merchant spoke of

how it could run faster than any horse, leap higher than a stag, and track prey over miles with an unerring nose for fear.

Perhaps it was in that moment that the King's thoughts began to turn toward destiny. He purchased the beast for a heavy price of silver, taking it away from the market with his men. For many days it remained in his custody, bound yet alive, its yellow gaze fixed always upon him.

Jonathan watched as the King fed it—sometimes with scraps, sometimes with fresh-caught fish from the sea. The King would sit for hours just looking at it, as if weighing some great decision.

On the seventh day, as the market of Carnac roared with trade and the air smelled of roasted meats and burning incense, King Benjamin called his people together. He announced that he would proclaim his kingship to all the tribes, not just as ruler of France, but as sovereign of all lands he might one day claim. The raptor, he declared, would be the center of this proclamation.

Upon the great stone dais in the heart of Carnac, the King brought forth the beast. The ropes held it, but its tail lashed and its jaws snapped at the air. Before the assembled crowd, King Benjamin took up the sacred instruments of sacrifice—blades of flint, bowls of polished granite, and a single, heavy altar stone.

The raptor's death was swift but terrible. Blood dark as wine poured across the stone, and a great stillness fell over the crowd. Then, in a ritual older than memory, the King took from the creature's flesh and ate.

Those who were there swear they saw something change in his eyes. Where before they were sharp, now they were sharper still—like the glint of the raptor's own. He stood taller, his voice carrying farther as he proclaimed:

> "This is the Year One. I am King Benjamin, guided by the cunning of the Raptor. My reign shall be as swift and enduring as its hunt, and my people shall never be prey, but predators upon the earth."

From that day forth, the raptor became the emblem of his banner—its curved claw drawn in black upon red cloth. His laws took on the creature's nature: swift in judgment, merciless to invaders, yet fiercely protective of the land and people. Trade flourished under his rule, and the market of Carnac became a center of the world's commerce.

Jonathan, who had stood at the King's side through it all, would later write that it was not the eating of the raptor's flesh that changed the King, but the act of taking its strength into the heart of his people. It was a symbol, a covenant between man and beast, sealing the beginning of a new age.

The world remembers little of the spring of 7700 before the sun shifted and the sky lost its darkness. But the people of that time remembered, for many generations, that their calendar began not with a birth, nor a victory in battle, but with the death of a beast whose hunger for life became the hunger of a kingdom.

And so the Year One began, and the Raptor King’s legacy was carved into the stones of Carnac, where even now the wind seems to whisper the hiss of a predator long gone.